

HUNTER HOLMES McGUIRE

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“The greatest thing any living soul can do is to see something clearly and tell it plainly.”

HUNTER HOLMES McGUIRE was born at Winchester, Virginia, October 11, 1835. He was the son of Dr. Hugh Holmes McGuire and Eliza Moss of Fairfax County, Virginia. The family were originally from the County of Fermanagh, in Ireland. His grandfather, Captain Edward McGuire, was a well-known figure in the Continental Army.

Young Hunter received his academic education at the Winchester Academy, where his father before him had been a student. His early medical training was gotten at the Winchester Medical College, a school founded and conducted by his father and a group of physicians. His studies were later completed in the medical schools of Philadelphia.

From 1856 to 1858 he held the Chair of Anatomy in the Winchester Medical College. He then returned to Philadelphia, where he conducted a quiz class with Doctors Pancoast and Lockett. It was about this time that the shadow of John Brown dropped like a black curtain along Mason and Dixon's line, and men on either side no longer saw clearly nor understood one another. It was like “the burden of Egypt”; when the Egyptian was set against the Egyptian, and they fought, every man against his brother, city against city, and kingdom against kingdom. Feeling ran high in the City of Brotherly Love; and, as it has always been and doubtless always will be, the sparks fell first and blazed quickest among the students of the city.

It was now that young McGuire first showed those qualities of leadership that were to carry him to greater and greater heights in later years. A young man comparatively unknown, without special power of oratory or persuasive eloquence, he quickly organized the Southern students, three hundred strong, and led them in a body to Richmond, to finish their studies in the more kindly and sympathetic atmosphere of the Medical College of Virginia. Having located his friends in congenial surroundings he soon went to New Orleans and took up the practice of his profession.

And now came war! It was 1861, and we find young McGuire a private in the ranks of the first volunteer company that marched out of Winchester. He

was soon singled out by Jackson, who was quick to see those qualities that make for executive success, and so in a few months we see him medical director of Jackson's Army, a position which he held until the enactment of that staggering tragedy at Chancellorsville. After the death of his chief, he served as medical director of the Second Army Corps until the close of the war.

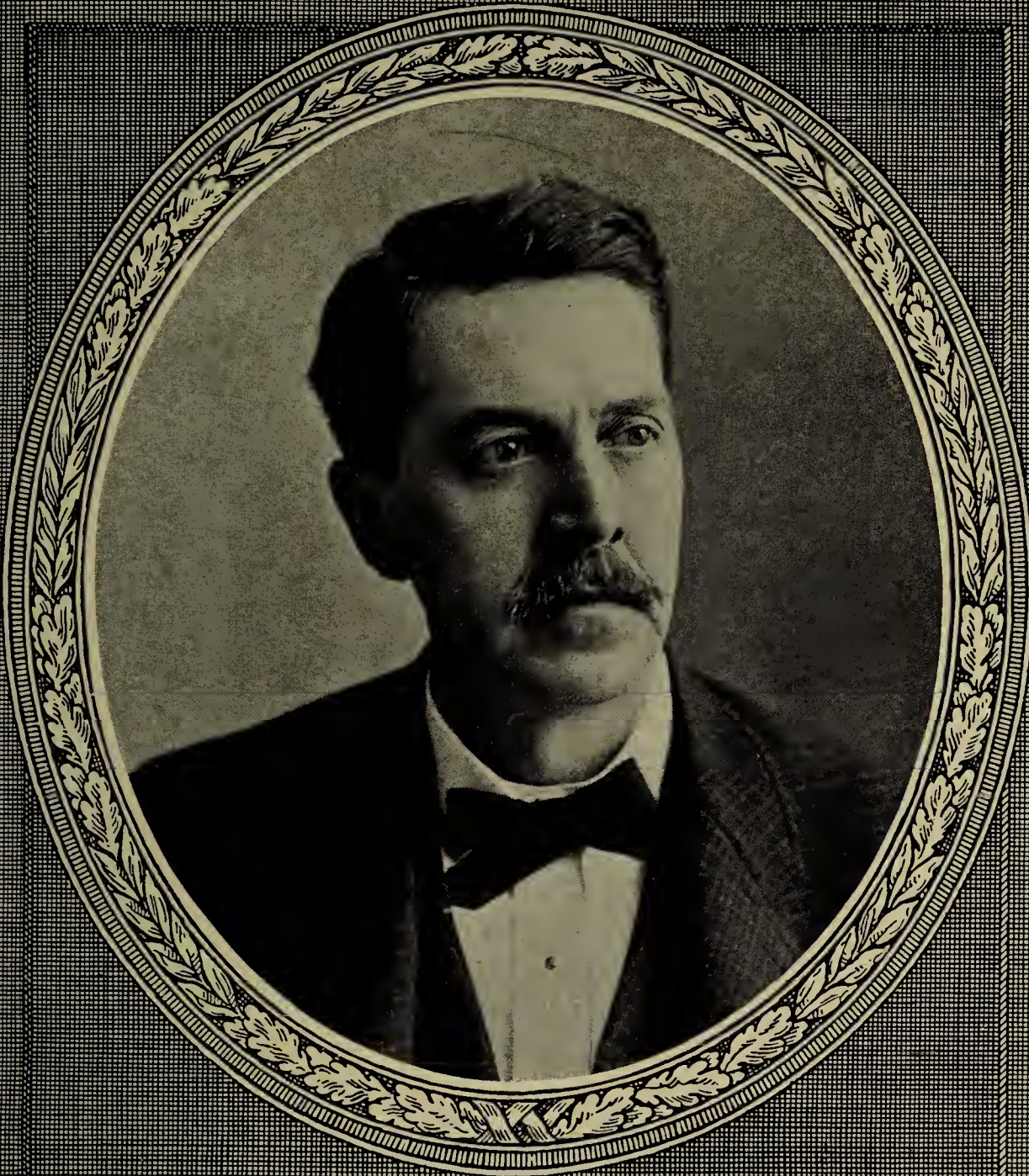
To see how well he bore himself in the eyes of that rigid disciplinarian, one need only glance at Jackson's official reports and dispatches, which are filled with a generous measure of praise for his medical director. It was he who inaugurated the freeing of captured Medical Officers, a generous and humane inspiration which was quickly reciprocated by the Federal Army, thus establishing a splendid precedent which soon became a recognized practice. Much has been written and more might be told of his military record, of his intimate association with that master of strategy in his brilliant campaigns in the Valley of Virginia,—of the lightning-like strokes that fell, no man might say when or where. But in the fulness of a life so big, so replete with varied activities, the chronicler must not be tempted to linger too long in one field.

In 1866 he was married to Miss Mary Stuart, daughter of Alexander H. H. Stuart, of Staunton, Virginia. To them were born three sons and six daughters.

He now made Richmond his home and once more entered on the practice of his profession.

In the midst of a busy life he always found time to pause or stop to battle for the right. Notable among such occasions was the fight that was being waged by Captain John Cussons and others against the histories that were being used in the Southern schools. To keep the facts of history straight, when vision twisted and warped by bitterness would have given our children a false impression of what their fathers fought and died for, was a cause he could not resist. Into it he threw himself with all his whole-hearted vigor and force, until the desired aim was accomplished. This achievement alone would have set him apart as a man among men.

But it is not for this that he is best remembered. It is not for the long list of professional honors that were heaped upon him; from president of the Medical Society of Virginia, of which he had been a founder, to president of the Southern Surgical Association, president of the Association of Medical Officers of the Army and Navy of the Confederate States, president of the American Medical Association, and president of the American Surgical Association. It is not for the honorary degrees of doctor of laws conferred upon him by the University of North Carolina and Jefferson College of Philadelphia. It is not as the founder and president of a great Medical School, the University College of Medicine, which sent hosts of young men to all the States in the Union. It is not as founder of St. Luke's Hospital, one of the earliest private hospitals in the South, in which his work still lives and goes on under the skilful management of his gifted eldest



HUNTER H. MCGUIRE
1835-1900

son, Dr. Stuart McGuire, whom he reared and trained to fill his place when the time should come for him to rest from his labors. It is not for any of these notable achievements that men best remember him or most delight to do him honor.

But it is Hunter McGuire the teacher who has left his image deeply graven on all the hearts and minds of men with whom he came in contact. This is the figure that stands out clear-cut, pre-eminent.

But what were the qualities of this tall, gaunt, angular man, without eloquence of speech or charm of voice or manner, that made men listen to his every word, that make them remember words, phrases, sentences, with every inflection of his voice, for nearly half a century? It was not the clear intellect of the man that made this compelling appeal. It was a deep, encompassing love of his fellow man; never expressed, but shown in a thousand ways, that sets him thus apart.

In those days surgeons were evolved, they were never made. They came up from the practice of Medicine by slow degrees, with toil and labor. But the process made well-rounded men, and Dr. McGuire was no exception, for he was first a brilliant physician, and then a distinguished surgeon. He had a quick intuitive grasp that was at times almost uncanny. He doubtless never reckoned in percentages. He seemed not to work deductively nor through the slower process of elimination.

His mind, a veritable treasure trove filled with the riches of experience, seemed able instantly to flash out a duplicate of any clinical picture that might be needed for comparison; just as the finger-print expert might reach down from his files the fatal duplicate of the criminal's thumb print.

Each case was with him a separate thing to be reckoned with individually. But first of all it was a living human being with the love of life in his heart and an inherent right to live. He seemed the husband pondering the problem of the sick wife; the father looking down on the afflicted child; and, at times, with these little crippled ones, the touch of the big red hands was even that of the mother herself. This was the key, the secret of this man's power to chain men and women to him blindly for a lifetime; a deep, far-reaching, practical humanity, that was all the more beautiful for blunt efforts at concealment.

"He saw things clearly and told them plainly."

As has been said, he was not an orator; and yet no man ever got a fuller meaning out of words than he. Abruptly he would say: "And that poor fellow's suffering was frightful." Immediately that word "frightful" took on a new meaning, and one saw the poor fellow suffering the very tortures of the damned.

Who ever heard the history of the first prostatic on whom the first suprapubic cystostomy was done—the operation that sent his name halfway round the world; who ever heard that simple story of the extremity of human suffering and its blessed relief, and ever forgot a single detail of that vivid picture?

Never was he at better advantage than when, as he would sometimes do, he pushed all the operative work aside and had a blanket spread on the amphitheater floor, with a group of little crippled children on it. Hip-joint disease, Pott's disease of the spine, tuberculosis of the joints and bones; how he hammered home the early symptoms and diagnostic signs! How mercilessly he fixed the personal responsibility for failure to recognize them! How many men who read this must instantly visualize that picture!—the little hunch-back, with rigid spine, squatting down to pick up his bunch of keys. Is it not the very acme of teaching that men will so remember?

In his operative work he was practical, dextrous, and ingenious. He was quick to make a decision, and once his decision was made he went through with his plans to the end.

It must be remembered that much of his work, like that of the pioneer, was in untrod fields; much of it was done in pre-aseptic times when the mortality rate alone, even in skilful hands, was enough to stagger any but the most courageous. Unlike many men of his time who faced a new era, he was quick to see the good of the new, to grasp it, and turn it to his uses. He wasted no time in the forlorn fight of the older order in its bitter rear-guard action against the new. Listerism he readily embraced, and we find him an enthusiastic exemplar of its principles. When many men of his age were vigorously assailing the germ theory, he was busily engaged in teaching those very principles and demonstrating them by practical application in the operating room. With rare judgment which seemed almost intuitive he gleaned what was good from the new and winnowed out the chaff. In short, he was among that small group of men who marched on with the times.

It was only a year before his last illness that he had completed and equipped a large new modern hospital to take the place of the old, and to better care for his ever increasing practice.

He was never an idler, but was always engaged in some useful activity, as though time were too precious a thing to squander. His recreations were few. He most loved to be in his summer home, "Westwood," not far from Richmond, in a grove of great oaks, with flowers and birds and growing things about him. It was here, surrounded by his family, that, after a lingering illness of more than a year, on the morning of September 19, 1900, death claimed him.

To his funeral the people flocked to do honor to his memory; men, women, and children, from every walk of life, and old comrades clad in gray. A year later out of the full hearts of a grateful people a monument arose in the Capital Square, close to his beloved Jackson. There he sits, calm, dignified, reserved; just as he sat listening to the tales of suffering of his people—counselling, advising, always helping, giving. Every line of the pose is perfect. The sculptor, indeed, has modelled well. There he sits close by the scenes of his greatest activities:

close to the hospitals and institutions of learning that he founded and fostered; in the shadow of the capitol of the Confederacy; close to Jackson.

What are they thinking of, these two strong men of bronze, as the years go by? What is in their hearts, as the South sends forth its thousands of young men, khaki-clad, marching to new music under the flag they fought against? What do they say to one another, far in the night when the lights are low?

Who knows?



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